

5/09/2005 This Week in Congress

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May 9, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful.

Honoring the Lives of Two Kansans Killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom

On Monday, I had the honor of joining members of the U.S. Army during services at Fort Riley to remember the life of Army First Sergeant Timmy J. Millsap, of Salina. Sergeant Millsap was killed on April 25 in Taji, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. Also this week, it was learned that Kansas Army National Guard Specialist Derrick Lutters, 24, of Goodland, was killed on May 1 in Baghdad, when the vehicle he was riding in was attacked by a suicide bomber.

Millsap is the forty-ninth Fort Riley soldier who has died while serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Lutters is the third Kansas Guard soldier who has been killed in the war.

Both of these men, these heroes, exemplify what is best about Kansans: courage, dedication, and sacrifice for the good of others. Timmy was committed to protecting our nation, returning to Iraq for his second rotation, while Derrick was a citizen-soldier who courageously left his life at home to answer our country's call to duty. This is a sad week for our state, but I join the citizens of our country, the people of Kansas, and our service members in Iraq, who are indebted to these two men for their brave service. Their sacrifice will not be forgotten.

Funding Approved to Support Troops, Build Housing at Fort Riley

This week, the House passed final legislation to provide additional support for troops serving in the War on Terrorism and for improvements to Fort Riley, Kansas. The Emergency Supplemental Wartime Appropriations Act will provide for better armor, increased benefits to service members' families and more support for troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The legislation provides for additional protective gear for soldiers operating in the field, including body armor and armored vehicles. It also increases the amount of financial assistance for families of soldiers killed in combat from \$12,420 to \$100,000. Funds are also included in the legislation to train and equip Iraqi and Afghani armed forces to take over the responsibilities of defense from American troops.

In addition, this legislation includes \$47 million to Fort Riley to use for the construction of new barracks. This funding will help the fort better mobilize and train forces. As the War on Terror continues, it is important that we make the tools necessary for our troops to best perform their duties. The legislation is expected to pass the Senate this week and then be sent to the President for his signature.

House Passes Improvements to Technical Education

This week, I supported House passage of H.R. 366, the Vocational and Technical Education for the Future Act. This legislation reauthorizes the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, which provides for career and technical education programs at secondary and post-secondary schools.

I am a strong supporter of the Perkins program. In Kansas, vocational, career and technical education helps our state develop a well-educated and productive workforce that can compete successfully in today's market. The Senate passed legislation to reauthorize Perkins in March, so Congress will now work to resolve the differences between the Senate and House versions.

I have heard from many career and technical education professionals in Kansas and understand their perspectives for reauthorization of the Perkins Act. As the House and Senate work to finalize this legislation, I will remember the importance of these programs to our state.

Hearing Held to Review Federal Crop Insurance

Wednesday I chaired a hearing of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management to review the Federal Crop Insurance System. The hearing, which featured testimony from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials as well as crop insurance agents from across the country, allowed the subcommittee to evaluate the delivery and effectiveness of crop insurance for farmers.

The federal crop insurance program provides a safety net for producers to protect themselves from devastating crop losses due to weather, pests or disease. This week's hearing focused on crop insurance as it relates to soybean rust and Premium Reduction Plans.

The hearing came a week after officials in Georgia discovered the first outbreak of soybean rust in the U.S. this year. While we have not yet had any reports of rust in Kansas, producers and the crop insurance industry need to be prepared for that possibility. The hearing also focused on Premium Reduction Plans, which allow insurance providers who can show savings in the delivery of the crop insurance program, without adversely affecting service to farmers, to pass that savings on to farmers in the form of reduced premiums.

This hearing was a useful update on the status of the crop insurance program. My subcommittee will continue gathering feedback from producers, the Administration and the industry regarding crop insurance to ensure that the system better meets the needs of crop producers.

Washington, D.C. Meetings on Agriculture

Just days after being sworn in as the new Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, Chuck Conners came by my office to discuss the next farm bill. The visit gave me an opportunity to congratulate the new Deputy Secretary, as well as let him know my thoughts, and those of Kansans I've talked to, about the farm bill process. Over the coming months, USDA will be gathering input from producers across the country on the effectiveness of the 2002 farm bill, in preparation for the next bill.

Also this week, Connecticut Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro met with me about agriculture and agriculture policy. As the new ranking member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, she wanted to get the perspective of a Member of Congress who represents an agriculture-dependent state, like Kansas. I appreciated the opportunity to provide a better understanding to an urban Member of Congress on the way of life we lead in Kansas.

Presenting the Building Better Communities Award to Kansas Communities

Late last year, I began presenting the "Building Better Communities" award to Kansas towns in order to recognize and share how creative thinking and teamwork make a positive difference in rural America. This week, I was able to present two of these awards in conjunction with the Big First Listening Tour.

On Monday, I joined citizens of Longford for the ribbon cutting of Longford Water Company, LLC. The community-based group has formed the company in order to bottle and sell Longford's high quality water. For years, this town of 89 people has had a reputation for providing high quality, good tasting water. Groundwater from Longford is naturally clean and soft because it is filtered by a distinctive group of underground rocks known as the Kiowa Formation.

On Friday, Kensington-area residents were recognized for the opening of their new grocery store. When the community's only grocery store closed a year and a half ago, townspeople joined together to form The Kensington Community Store, Inc., to oversee the construction and development of a non-profit community grocery store with a noon deli. Since that time, the group has raised more than \$130,000 to support the project.

In order for rural communities to survive and prosper in the future, citizens must be willing to create their own opportunities for success. The Longford Water Company and the Kensington Community Store are just two examples of how hard work, innovation, professional management and community pride can create such an opportunity.

Big First Tour Continues

Both of these "Building Better Communities" award presentations were held in conjunction with stops along the Big First Listening Tour. Other stops this week, in addition to Longford, in Clay County, and Kensington, in Smith County, were Council Grove, in Morris County; Belleville, in Republic County; Mankato, in Jewell County; and Phillipsburg, in Phillips County.

The tour continues over the coming months. For a full list of the times and dates of when I'll be in your county, visit my website here: <http://www.house.gov/apps/list/>

http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ks01_moran/041105TheTour.html

Walking to Raise Awareness of the Mentally Ill

On Saturday, I joined northwest Kansas residents for a walk-a-thon on behalf of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI). NAMI is a non-profit support and advocacy organization in support of people with severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and anxiety disorders. The purpose of the walk is to gather funding for research, but also to raise awareness of the work of NAMI.

I commend the work that local workers, such as those at High Plains Independence Inc. of Hays, do to assist those with mental illness and am honored to have this opportunity to support this worthwhile cause.

Also on Saturday in Hays, I attended the annual dinner performance of the Hays High School Chamber Singers. My wife, Robba, is the accompanist for the group.

In the Office

Several large groups of Kansans were in the office this week, including trustees and managers of various Kansas electrical cooperatives, doctors and hospital administrators representing the Kansas Hospital Association and pharmacists representing the Kansas Association of Community Pharmacists. Also in this week was Trace Walker from Blue Beacon International in Salina. Mr. Walker was representing the National America's Travel Plazas and Truck Stops and was in to talk about highway funding. Also in from Salina this week was Elaine Edwards, with the National Association for the Education of Young Children. She discussed child education issues such as Head Start.

Librarians from across the state were in to discuss issues important to the Kansas Library Association. Those in my office included Dennis Wilson of Dodge City, Pat Gaunce of Kansas City, Patti Butcher, Tim Rogers and Rosanne Siemens, all of Topeka, and Michelle Swain of Arkansas City. In to discuss education issues with the National Education Association were Tom Brungardt of Pratt and Pam Taverner of Wichita. Also this week, representatives from the rural telecommunications industry were in to talk about current telecom issues facing Congress. Their group included Larry Sevier with Rural Telephone in Lenora, Dick Veatch and Catherine Moyer of Pioneer Telephone in Ulysses, Archie Macias of Wheat State Telephone in Udall, Gordon Mikesell of Southern Kansas Telephone in Clearwater, and Mark Gailey and Bill McBride with Totah Communications in Oklahoma.

Very truly yours,

Jerry